

MID-YEAR UPDATE



FROM STATE SENATOR

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Serving the 21st District

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Dear Friend:

Our state is suffering from an economic and unemployment crisis, and that means our citizens and their families are suffering. We cannot leave anyone or any business behind in our fight to protect jobs in our great state. I am committed to solving our unemployment and budget woes without raising taxes and, while that means making tough choices, that is what my colleagues and I are here to do in order to fight on your behalf to get people back to work and get our economy moving forward again.

It is our responsibility to make sure that your tax dollars are spent wisely and that you see real returns that improve your quality of life. This means that we will protect school aid, increase school funding by \$175 per pupil, encourage job and small business growth, attract new job providers to the state, fix Michigan's roads, and ensure that state departments operate within their means.

That is why I am providing you with this legislative update. I want to hear from you; so, if you have any comments or questions on this or any other issue of concern to you, please feel free to contact my office at the address, phone, number or e-mail address listed above.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "Ron Jelinek".

Ron Jelinek
State Senator
21st District

Agriculture and Rural Community Roundtable

A new law enacted earlier this summer creates an agriculture and rural communities roundtable in the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). Under Senate Bill 226, now Public Act 47 of 2005, the group will evaluate how the laws, rules, and policies administered by the DEQ affect farmers, food processors, agribusinesses, and rural communities.

The roundtable will provide advice and recommendations to the Department on policies that affect agricultural businesses. This advice should help limit overburdensome regulations and help improve the rural economy.

Agriculture is the state's second largest economy. It is an important part of the economic vitality and quality of life in the 21st District.

Senate Works to Stimulate Economy & Create New Jobs

Michigan currently is experiencing an unacceptably high unemployment rate. The livelihoods of our citizens are at stake, and the Legislature is working hard to protect jobs and invest in the future of this great state. The following are some of the initiatives the Senate has been working on to responsibly and effectively promote job growth and economic prosperity in Michigan:

ELIMINATING TAXES ON NEW JOBS, thereby increasing the hiring of new employees and creating new jobs in the private sector. Currently, businesses are taxed more when they hire new workers.

CUTTING TAXES ON SMALL BUSINESSES TO CREATE NEW JOBS, qualifying more businesses for the Single Business Tax Small Business Credit.

ENCOURAGING INVESTMENT IN JOB TRAINING THROUGH TAX CREDITS, which will allow working adults to further their education and improve their work skills.

ELIMINATING GOVERNMENT RED TAPE that threatens jobs.

RELIEVING THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN RURAL MICHIGAN and boosting the tourism industry in the region.

CREATING TAX INCENTIVES FOR MICHIGAN-BASED TECHNOLOGY FIRMS. Offering tax rebates to "angel investors" who provide initial start-ups for new high-technology firms will give these entrepreneurs the capital needed to fund new ventures and create jobs.

PROMOTING TRAVEL AND TOURISM IN THE MIDWEST by creating an agreement with other states to create a multi-state recreational pass program known as The Great Lakes Recreational Pass.

Did You Know?

The single greatest expenditure of the State of Michigan is the funding of education for children. The total for fiscal year 2004-2005 is \$12.5 billion.

School funding has increased every year except one since Proposal A was approved by the voters in 1994.

Michigan is one of ten states selected to receive an "Honor State" grant to help raise high school graduation and college readiness rates under the Redesigning the American High School Initiative. The state will use the money to expand college-level learning opportunities in high schools.

Order Free Annual Credit Report

To prevent Michigan residents from becoming victims of identity theft, which thousands of Americans fall prey to each year, credit reports can be obtained for free, once a year. To obtain a copy of your report, go online to www.annualcreditreport.com or call toll-free 1-877-322-8228. Use caution when ordering your report, especially online, and be aware of scams and fraudulent sites. Check out the Consumer Alert posted by the Michigan Attorney General at www.michigan.gov/ag for helpful information.

Grandparent Visitation Guidelines Enacted

I am very pleased to say that legislation to restore grandparent visitation was passed into law in January.

PA 542 of 2004 allows grandparents to seek grandparenting time under one or more of the following circumstances:

- Pending or finalized divorce, separate maintenance, or annulment of the child’s parents;
- Parent of the child is deceased;
- Parents have never married and are not residing in the same household and paternity has been established;
- Unless otherwise provided, legal custody of the child has been given to a person other than the child’s parent, or the child does not reside in the home of the parent;
- Grandparent has provided previous (one year) established custodial situation.

Grandparents perform a vital role in a child’s learning experience and I am pleased that Michigan has acknowledged and honored this role.

Senior-friendly Tax Measures

Too often, those who file their state income tax returns using paper forms have found that their refunds take far longer to receive than electronic returns. This can be distressing, especially for seniors, who often depend on their returns to provide for necessary but expensive items such as prescription drugs and to help pay their taxes.

To assist seniors in receiving their refunds in a timely manner, legislation has been introduced that requires the state Department of Treasury to notify, within ten days, a taxpayer whose return is selected for manual review. Treasury will also be required to include an approximate time frame for the review and contact information for someone at the Department who can assist the taxpayer with any questions.

Additional legislation has been introduced that will raise the income threshold, for people who qualify, to defer the due date of their summer taxes until February 15. Currently at \$25,000, the bill increases the allowable gross household income to \$35,000 in 2005 and eventually to \$40,000 in 2007. Due to the recent date change to summer for collection of county taxes, many people have increased tax bills. This legislation will definitely be helpful to seniors who have been financially impacted by the tax date change.

Armchair Hunting

Armchair computer hunting would be banned in Michigan under legislation passed in June by the Senate. Aimed at the relatively new practice of Internet hunting, the three-bill package would make it illegal to hunt using a computer to remotely control a firearm or crossbow or to operate such a business in the state.

These hunting operations allow “hunters” the chance to control a video camera and rifle and, with the click of a mouse, fire at game animals. This type of activity violates every standard of hunting and reduces it to the level of a trivial “point-and-click” video game. I voted in support of these bills to maintain the integrity of Michigan’s rich hunting heritage. If you would like more information on this legislative package—Senate Bills 373 and 620 and House Bill 4465—please contact my office toll-free at (866) 305-2121 or by e-mail at senrjelinek@senate.michigan.gov.

Senate Is Firm: Keep School Bus Safety Inspections

Alarmed that the School Bus Inspection Program was slated for elimination under the Governor’s proposed budget, the Senate took the lead to keep the inspection program intact. In addition, my colleagues and I rejected the proposal to repeal the state law requiring school bus inspections.

Last year alone, state school bus inspections sidelined more than 2,000 of the state’s 17,800 buses (nearly 13 percent) for serious safety violations. This is no time to eliminate a law that takes defective buses off the road. School buses travel thousands of miles each year and our children’s safety has to be the number one priority. There is simply no way to justify the cost savings should a serious accident occur that could have been prevented with an inspection.

The inspection program is part of the Michigan State Police budget bill. All the budget bills have been sent to conference committees where the Senate and House work out any differences.



Receive Free E-Legislative updates!

If you would like to receive periodic legislative updates via e-mail, please send a short note to senrjelinek@senate.michigan.gov. Electronic mail is an inexpensive and convenient method to transmit information to interested citizens.

Mourning Dove Season on Hold

After a successful opening season last fall, the 2005 and 2006 mourning dove hunts are suspended. This abrupt reversal is due to the State Board of Canvassers’ June approval of the petition signatures to put a referendum on dove hunting before the voters on the November 2006 ballot.

The 2004 hunt, the first in Michigan in nearly 100 years, was rated a good hunting experience. Over 3,000 of the 5,000 hunters who bought a dove stamp took part in the fall hunt, harvesting an average of nine doves. With the 2004 hunt, Michigan joined 40 other states in offering a hunting season on mourning doves. Its future rests with Michigan voters in November 2006.

Senate Combats Pollution

The Senate has passed groundbreaking legislation to safeguard Michigan's Great Lakes against further invasion of aquatic nuisance species. Senate Bill 332, now Public Act 33 of 2005, establishes the Great Lakes Aquatic Nuisance Coalition, which will be responsible for eliminating damaging biological pollution in the Great Lakes and guarding against discharges of ballast water from ocean going vessels.

Although laws are in place to prevent ballast water dumping, harmful aquatic species are still frequently introduced into Michigan's waterways due to certain exemptions in the federal Clean Water Act. This legislation should curtail the introduction of 162 nuisance species in the Great Lakes and protect one of our state's most precious natural resources from damaging marine invaders. Shielding the Great Lakes from pollution not only preserves the incomparable beauty and safety of Michigan's waters, but is also crucial to the well-being of our citizens and to our state's tourism industry and economy.

Youth Hunting

What better way to pass Michigan's outdoor heritage on to a new generation than by taking a young person hunting? Along with gaining new skills and a hands-on experience, the young hunter learns respect for nature and an enduring love of the land. And spending time in the great outdoors takes on new meaning when spending it with a parent, grandparent, or favorite relative.

Two special events this fall can help introduce a young person to hunting.

- A youth waterfowl hunt in September for properly licensed youth (ages 12-15) is expected to be authorized by federal authorities. For details, including hunting dates, see the 2005-2006 Michigan Waterfowl Hunting Guide, available September 1, 2005.
- A youth firearm deer weekend will be held September 24-25. Young hunters 12-16 may take one deer during this special two-day season. Youths 12 and 13 years of age cannot hunt deer with a firearm and are restricted to archery-only hunting. Be sure to check the 2005-2006 Hunting and Trapping Guide for other restrictions and information.

All young hunters are required to successfully complete a hunter safety course and earn a certificate before being licensed. You can look for these classes at: www.michigandnr.com/hunting/recnsrch.asp.

Protecting Investment: The Michigan Farm Produce Insurance Program

A new program is now in place to help provide a safety net for farmers. Starting this year, farm produce buyers or grain dealers in Michigan are required to collect a .002 premium when farm produce is sold to a dealer. Farm produce includes cereal grains, corn, dry edible beans, small grains, and soybeans. The premiums go to the Michigan Farm Produce Insurance Fund to pay farmers in the event of a business failure of a farm produce or grain dealer. The program is voluntary. Farmers who have paid into the fund will be entitled to payment protection. Those producers who request a refund of the premiums paid will not be eligible to receive payment from the fund. More detailed information is available at www.michigan.gov/mda.

The fund is administered by the Michigan Farm Produce Insurance Authority under legislation enacted in 2003. Over the last ten years, the failure of licensed grain dealers in Michigan has resulted in a loss to producers of approximately \$1 million.

Boosting Michigan's Rural Economy

Michigan's rural areas could receive a much-needed economic boost under recently introduced legislation. Rural areas are a great place to live and raise a family but often face a competitive disadvantage for business and job creation. A smaller labor pool and a smaller tax base, which limits infrastructure development, can stunt economic growth opportunities. To support rural job development, the proposal would:

- Encourage trained workers to remain in rural areas through an educational loan repayment incentive. It would also create an agricultural processing apprenticeship program to increase skilled labor and help young people gain practical work skills.
- Require the Michigan Broadband Development Authority to allot \$1 million each year to rural, underserved areas through the seed capital loan program.
- Create a \$500 tax credit for landowners and companies for building cell phone towers in rural areas.
- Establish a low-interest loan program for methane digesters and a property tax exemption for agricultural renewable energy systems.
- Create an agriculture tourism zoning commission and an agriculture and rural communities advisory council to look at the effects of government rules and regulations on agricultural businesses.

The ideas for the rural development plan were generated by the agricultural community at an April 2004 food processing summit. For more information on this legislation or to be kept up to date on the progress of the package, contact my office toll-free at (866) 305-2121 or by e-mail at senrjelinek@senate.michigan.gov.

Cutting Red Tape

Milk producers and livestock dealers are among those helped by a more efficient state permit and license system under legislation enacted last year. The new laws establish a maximum processing time for licenses and permits and require the Department of Agriculture to return application fees and provide a 15-percent discount the following year if the processing deadline is missed. Public Acts 277, 278, 279, and 280 were part of a Senate effort to dismantle barriers to job creation in Michigan. Visit www.michiganlegislature.org or contact my office for more information.

Managing for Wise Use

By the very nature of their livelihood, many farmers are active conservationists. The Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) provides farmers with an added tool for environmental stewardship. The program is voluntary and teaches effective practices that comply with state and federal regulations and shows farmers how to find and prevent agricultural pollution risks on their farms.

Along with learning cost-effective management practices, MAEAP participation helps farmers show the public they are "good neighbors" and practice environmentally sound agriculture. With more people moving into rural areas and closer scrutiny of farming operations, good land stewardship helps protect our agricultural heritage. Visit www.maeap.org for full information on the program.



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Senate Takes Action to Shield Children from Violent and Sexually Explicit Video Games

Recently the Senate passed legislation aimed at preventing youth from buying or renting violent or sexually explicit video games. The popularity and abundance of video games on the market today is making it increasingly difficult to monitor the types of programming, publications, and various other media to which our children are being exposed. This bill is designed to ease that burden on parents and guardians and allow them to make informed decisions as to whether or not a video game is appropriate for their child.

Senate Bill 416 would prohibit the sale or rental of ultra violent video games to any person under the age of 17 and make sexually explicit video games subject to the same restrictions as materials of similar content, such as books, movies, and magazines. Violators would be charged with a felony punishable by up to two years' imprisonment and a fine of up to \$10,000.

Legislature Fights to Keep Sexual Predators Out of Schools

A sobering report released by the U.S. Department of Education estimates that 1 in 10 children will encounter sexual misconduct from a school employee. To make sure that every parent's worst fear isn't realized, the Senate passed tough legislation that keeps sexual predators away from children in school.

The legislation includes:

- Prohibiting someone with a sex offense from being employed at a school or day care center;
- Requiring background checks on all paid school and day care employees;
- Creating "Student Safety Zones" around schools that prevent convicted sex offenders from living, working, or loitering within 1,000 feet of a school; and
- Requiring that school employees inform their administrators and the state about criminal sex crime charges pending against them.

Nothing is more important than the safety and security of our children. I believe this legislation would help ensure our children can learn in a safe, positive environment. The bills have been sent to the House for consideration.

Senate Acts to Defend Consumers Against Internet Scams

The Michigan Senate has overwhelmingly passed legislation to criminalize the installation of software that tracks Internet users' activity without their consent. Commonly known as spyware, this program secretly monitors the actions of computer users and has the capacity to steal valuable personal information, passwords, and account numbers and can diminish performance, even causing computers to crash. Too often, Internet users are unaware that they have been exposed to such a scam until they have already become victims.

Senate Bills 53, 54, and 151 would prohibit individuals from manufacturing, selling, or possessing spyware with the intent to violate the act. Violators could face fines of up to \$10,000 and imprisonment for up to five years. This legislation will ensure that Internet users can enjoy the benefits of technology and rest assured that their identities, personal information, and computer equipment are safe and secure.

Senator Jelinek Fights to Rid Our Communities of Dangerous Meth Labs

The number of Meth labs is growing at an alarming rate in Michigan. Today's drug dealers are buying their essential ingredients from our neighborhood grocery stores and producing the drug methamphetamine in homes, motels, and vehicles in every county in Michigan. In order to combat this, the Senate has taken action by passing legislation that will restrict the sale of products containing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine—both used to make methamphetamine—at grocery stores and pharmacies. (Sudafed, Nyquil, and Sinutab are common over-the-counter drugs with pseudoephedrine as the main ingredient.)

Senate Bill 189 is an effective tool in fighting this war on drugs because it requires stores to keep such medications behind the counter or within a locked case and requires customers to show valid photo identification when purchasing. These measures will protect law-abiding consumers and identify others who are purchasing these products for illegal meth-making purposes.